



TOWN HALL
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002-2351

Conservation Commission
(413) 259-3045
(413) 259-2410 [Fax]
conservation@amherstma.gov

MEMORANDUM

To: Town Meeting
From: Conservation Commission
Date: March 31, 2014
Re: Article 20B --Belchertown Road Acquisition

The Conservation Commission would like to express its strong support for the acquisition of the 20 acre parcel of land east of Belchertown Road. This represents a unique opportunity for the Town to purchase a special area with multiple benefits for the Fort River and Amherst community. The Commission feels that the significant resources which make this land important to preserve include: approximately 1,300 linear feet of frontage along the Fort River, associated wetlands, two vernal pools and acres of prime farmland.

The eastern half of the property adjacent to the river is mapped by the state as Priority Habitat for Rare Species and Estimated Habitat for Rare Wetland Species, and as Biomap 2 Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape. The combination of these factors make this a very important piece of land for the Town to own and supports many of the goals of the Town's Master Plan and Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP).

An application for funding was submitted to the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and Amherst has been awarded a matching LAND (Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity) Grant totaling \$105,665 for the project. To receive funding our proposal competed with projects from cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. To assist us with this effort, the Kestrel Land Trust recently pre-acquired the property with the hope that Town Meeting will support the use of CPA funds to match the state grant.

In addition, the Conservation Commission envisions portions of the property being used for a "sharing" garden, and leasing small 1 to 2 acre plots to new farmers. There is significant demand for tillable land in Amherst and the Commission is confident that many farmers will apply to use the available space. Grow Food Amherst, the Amherst Agricultural Commission and other community groups have offered their time and resources to help with these efforts.

Due to the properties' proximity to the Fort River Elementary School, the Commission believes it has the potential to become an outdoor classroom for school age children. An interpretive trail will provide access for students, residents of the village center and visitors alike to enjoy the river, fields, and gardens.

The land is adjacent to other permanently protected properties along the Fort River.

Town of



AMHERST

Massachusetts

TOWN HALL
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002-2351

Agricultural Commission
(413) 259-3045
(413) 259-2402 [Fax]

DATE: January 22, 2014
TO: Community Preservation Act Committee
FROM: Agricultural Commission
RE: Fort River Farm Conservation Area

We, the Agricultural Commission of Amherst, fully support the purchase of the Fort River Farm Conservation Area (Saul Property). We believe that this land is in an ideal location for reasons that include its central location, easy bus and walking access, proximity to the Fort River School and its unique conservation qualities associated with the Fort River which is home to several endangered species. We believe that with careful planning, the property will provide Amherst with a recreational, educational and agricultural space for the entire community

It is important to note that this land has been in agricultural use for decades. It is our understanding that new farmers in this area are very interested in working with established farmers and in starting to farm on small plots, which is exactly what this land could and should be used for. The Agricultural Commission supports making productive land available to Amherst residents in perpetuity.

Our Commission is fully committed to supporting the Town with this project, including providing our time and expertise regarding how the potential farm land will be used, as well as participating in the organization and implementation of the incubator farm lots.



December 5, 2013

TO: David Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager
FROM: John M. Gerber, Co-facilitator of Grow Food Amherst

The following is taken from the minutes of the September 9, 2013 meeting of the Steering Committee of Grow Food Amherst;

Rebecca Fricke moved and Aaron Drysdale seconded a motion that Grow Food Amherst take responsibility for providing leadership for a public brainstorming process to engage the Amherst community in creating a public vision for the community garden and living classroom aspects of the project. Approved unanimously (12-0-0).

On October 29, many of the 450 members of Grow Food Amherst attended a public conversation at Town Hall to discuss options for use of parcel in East Amherst. Among the many ideas proposed for the property by those in attendance were the following (which received the most support in an informal ballot):

- Collectively managed public food gardens
- Permaculture education plots
- Wild edible plants trail
- Young farmer practice plots (incubator farm)
- Public workshops on growing food

These suggestions are consistent with the mission of Grow Food Amherst which is:

...to create a resilient community by actively engaging residents to support creative endeavors for growing healthy and affordable food locally, including public places and neighborhoods, and by encouraging more sustainable agriculture and permaculture projects in the Amherst, MA area.

Grow Food Amherst supports acquisition of the property and is committed to provide leadership for planning and development of a community garden plot on the site. Our next meeting of our Steering Committee on December 11 will be devoted to discussing the project and creating a subcommittee to move forward with planning.



January 23, 2014

David Ziomek
Assistant Town Manager/
Director of Conservation & Development
Town of Amherst
4 Boltwood Avenue, Amherst, MA 01002

Dear Dave,

Kestrel Land Trust is pleased to support the effort to conserve the Saul property with the Town of Amherst to create a new Fort River Farm Conservation Area. The Kestrel Board of Trustees has committed to pre-acquiring the land from the landowner, Mr. Saul, and to temporarily owning the land until the Town can purchase it from Kestrel using a state LAND grant and CPA funds by June, 30 2014.

Kestrel is most interested in conserving this land because:

- it contains land classified as Biomap 2 Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape, or Priority Habitat for Rare and Endangered Species;
- it is in close proximity to critical water resources, including the Fort River, a medium-yield aquifer, and several vernal pools; and
- the land is adjacent to permanently protected active farmland.

In addition to supporting the conservation of this land, Kestrel recognizes the value of the Town's vision to integrate public community gardens, passive recreational opportunities, and agricultural education and support, all close to the village center. Through the service of our current AmeriCorps MassLIFT Community Engagement Coordinator, Kestrel plans to assist the efforts of the Town and Grow Food Amherst to create an "outdoor learning center" and community gardens on this land. We look forward to partnering with the Town and community volunteers to help make this vision a reality.

Sincerely,

Kristin DeBoer
Executive Director



March 11, 2014

David Ziomek
Assistant Town Manager/
Director of Conservation and Development
Town of Amherst
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002

Dear Mr. Ziomek,

The Amherst Survival Center supports community members' efforts to make fresh food accessible to all residents of the town. With the recent cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the rising costs of housing, transportation, and medical care, more and more residents of Amherst are struggling to make ends meet. Indeed, the Amherst Survival Center is seeing increasing numbers of our neighbors seeking assistance.

Creative approaches to addressing food insecurity, like the Sharing Garden proposed at the Saul Property, provide individuals and families with fresh produce as well as the chance to build transferrable skills. We are excited that the Sharing Garden could mean more food for the people who utilize the Amherst Survival Center's food pantry and fresh food distribution, access to agricultural land for residents of the East Amherst Village Center, and farming opportunities for our participants.

We are currently collaborating with the Stockbridge School of Agriculture and Not Bread Alone on a similar initiative, the Food for All project, where Stockbridge students, together with a weekly crew of volunteers, will grow food and flowers for donation to the recipients. Opportunities for community involvement will be many: planting, cultivation, harvest, and delivery of produce will all be done with volunteer participation. These kinds of initiatives, like the proposed town project, increase our capacity to reduce food insecurity.

Since the need for food in Amherst continues to grow, we are excited that another source of healthy food could be available to the Center's participants. Thank you for including our services in your planning.

Sincerely,

Sarah Barr
Board President

MASSACHUSETTS
Farm to School

Mr. David Ziomek
Director of Conservation and Development
Town Hall, 4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002

March 11, 2014

Dear Dave,

On behalf of Massachusetts Farm to School, I am pleased to extend our support for the Town of Amherst's purchase of the Saul property and transformation into a cooperative community garden. This effort to protect an important parcel along the Fort River is certainly worthwhile from a conservation perspective. The intended use of the land to support beginning farmers, educate young students, and engage the community around gardening is something that Mass. Farm to School fully supports. These activities fit within our mission to provide support to Massachusetts farmers, to provide access to local food in our area public schools, and to excite and educate about the role of agriculture in our lives.

Sincerely,

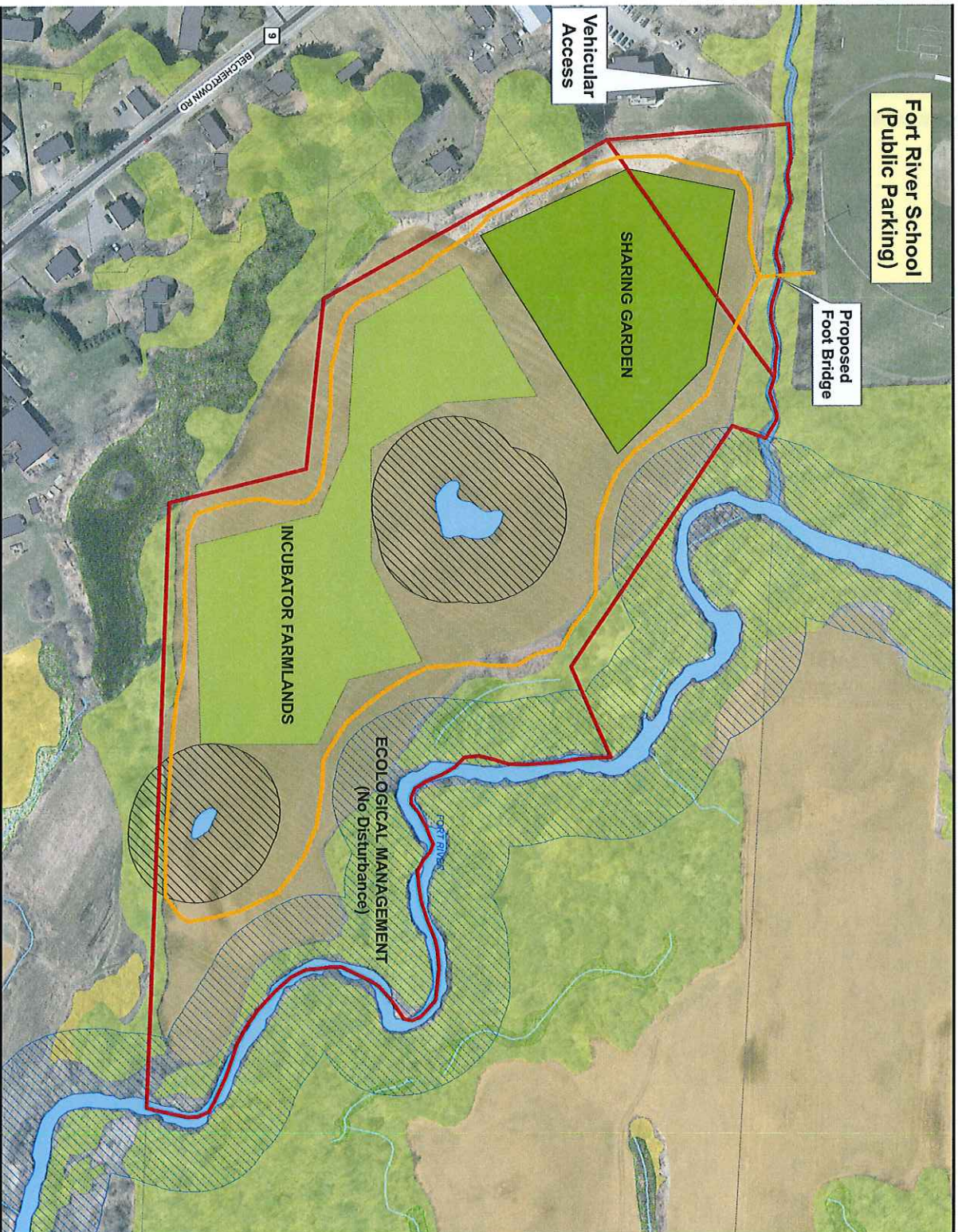
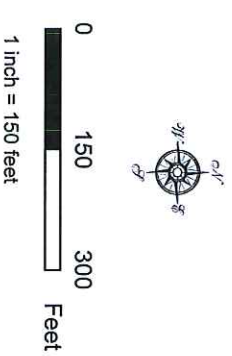


Erika Zekos
Development and Communications Coordinator
Mass. Farm to School

**2014 Annual
Spring Town Meeting
Article 20B-Open Space
Belchertown Rd. Acquisition**



- PROJECT AREA**
- Belchertown Road Property
 - Incubator Farmlands
 - Sharing Garden
 - Interpretive Trail
 - Vernal Pool Protection-100ft
 - River Buffer-100ft

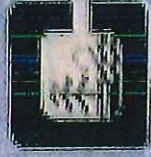




The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs



Governor Deval L. Patrick
Lt. Governor Timothy P. Murray
Secretary Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.



LAND Program

For November 26, 2013

\$105,665.00

Town of Amherst

By the Order of

One Hundred Five Thousand Six Hundred Sixty-five and 00/100

Dollars

**Saul Acquisition - Preservation of Farming
Along the Fort River**

Deval L. Patrick, Governor